

THE CHAPBOOK

(A MONTHLY MISCELLANY)

No. 21
MARCH
1921



A HOUSE

(MODERN MORALITY PLAY)

BY

FORD MADDOX HUEFFER

ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE NET

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(See also p. 3 of Cover)

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A MONTHLY MISCELLANY
No 21 March 1921

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Complete Human :

Herself	House-boy
Himself	Postman.
Maid	

Unborn Human :

Son of the House.

The Others :

The House Itself	The Milch Goat
The Tree	The Mare
The Nightingale	The Rooster
The House Dog	The Drake
The Cat of the House	Second Clock
First Clock	The Pigs, etc.





A House

The House Itself :

I am the House.

I resemble

The drawing of a child

That draws "Just a House". Two windows and two doors,

Two chimney pots,

Only two floors ;

Three windows on the upper one. A fourth

Looks towards the North.

I am very simple and mild ;

I am very gentle and old,

I have stood too long.

The Tree :

I am the great tree over above this house !

I resemble

The drawing of a tree. Drawing Just a Tree,

The child draws Me !

I am more old than the house is old.
I have known nights so cold
I used to tremble.
For the sap was frozen in my branches
And the mouse
That stored her nuts in my knot-holes, died. I am strong
Now. Let the storm come wild over the Sussex Wold
I do not fear it.
I have stood too long.

The Nightingale :

I am the Nightingale ; the summer through I sit
In the great tree, watching the house, and throw jewels
over it.
There is no soul watching but I ; no other soul to awaken
This echoing valley night.

The Son of the House :

You are mistaken !

I am the Son of the House.
That shall have silver limbs and clean, straight haunches,
Lean hips, clean lips and a tongue of gold—
That shall inherit
A golden voice and awaken
The whole world's wonder.

Nightingale :

Young blood, you are right.
So you and I only
Listen and watch and waken
Under
The stars of the night.

The House-dog :

You're mistaken !

This House stands lonely.
Let but a sound, sound in the seven acres that surround
Their sleeping house

And I, seeming to sleep shall awaken ;
Let but a mouse
Creep in the bracken,
I seeming to drowse, I shall hearken.
Let but a shadow darken
Their threshold, let but a finger
Lie long or linger,
Holding their latch !
I am their dog. And I watch !
For my god is my God
Of the tilth, of the sod,
Of the warren and bog.
I am Just Dog.
And, being His hound
I lie,
All night with my head on my paws,
Watchful and whist.

Nightingale :

So you and I and their son and I
Watch alone, under the stars of the sky.

The Cat of the House :

I am the Cat. And you lie !
I am the Atheist.
All laws
I coldly despise.
I have yellow eyes.
I am the Cat on the Mat the child draws
When it first has a pencil to use.

The Goat :

I am the Goat. I give milk.

The Cat of the House :

I muse
Over the hearth with my 'minishing eyes
Until after

The last coal dies.
Every tunnel of the mouse,
Every channel of the cricket
I have smelt ;
I have felt
The secret shiftings of the mouldered rafter,
And heard
Every bird in the thicket.
I see
You
Nightingale up in your tree.

Nightingale :

The night takes a turn towards coldness. The stars
Waver and shake.
Truly more wake,
More thoughts are afloat,
More folk are afoot than I knew.

Goat :

I am the goat.
I give milk.

Cat of the House :

Enough of this stuff of dust and of mud !
I, come of a race of strange things,
Of deserts and temples and kings
In the hot sands where the nightingale never sings—
Old He-Gods of ingle and hearth,
Old She-Gods of fur and of silk,
Not the mud of the Earth
Are the things that I dream of.

Goat :

Tibby-tab, more than you deem of
I dream of when chewing the cud
For my milk,
Who was born
Of a Nan with one horn and a liking for gin

In the backyard of an inn,
A child of Original Sin,
With a fleece of thin silk
And two horns in the bud,
I, made in the image of Pan,
With my corrugate, vicious-cocked horn,
Now make milk for a child yet unborn. . . .
It's a come-down !
And you with your mouse-coloured ruff
Discouraging your stuff-of-a-dream
Sell your birthright for cream
And bolt from a cuff or a frown.
Let be ; that's enough !

The House :

The top-star of the Plough now mounts
Up to his highest place ;
The dace
Hang silent in the pool.
The night is cool
Before the dawn. Behind the blind
Dies down the one white candle.
Our harried man,
My lease-of-a-life-long Master
Studies against disaster ;
Gropes for some handle
Against too-heavy Fate ; pores over his Accounts,
Studying into the morn,
For the sake of the child unborn.

Son of the House :

The vibrant notes of the Spheres,
Thin sifting sounds of dew
I hear. The mist on the meres
Rising I hear. So here's
To a lad shall be lusty and bold !
To a voice and a heart beating true,
And a House of a livelier hue. . . .

The House :

That is true.

I have stood here too long and grown old.

Himself :

What is the matter with the wicks ?

The candles waste in the draught,

The blinds are so thin.

Forty-four and four-ten

And ten

Are forty-nine . . .

And twenty pun twelve and six

Was all

I made by the clover.

It's a month since I laughed ;

I have given up wine. . . .

The Dog :

The mare's got out of the stable.

The Cat :

She's able, over and over,

To push up the stable latch—

Over and over again. You would say she's a witch

With a spite on our man.

Goat :

Heu ! Did you see how she ran !

She's after the clover ; she's over the ditch,

Doing more harm than a dozen of goats

When there's no one to watch. . . .

But she is the sober old mare with her skin full of oats . . .

And we are the goats,

Fed on bracken and heather,

Snatching now and then a scrap of old leather

Or half an old tin

As the price of Original Sin !

Himself :

I shall have to sell
The tall-clock from the hall,
I shall have to pawn my old dad's watch,
Or fell
The last old oak, or sell half the stock . . .
Or all !
Or the oak-chest out of the hall . . .
One or the other—or all.
God, it is Hell to be poor
For ever and ever—keeping the wolf from the door. . . .

Cat of the House :

Wouldn't you say
That Something, heavy and furry and grey
Was sniffing round the door ?
Wouldn't you say
Skinny fingers, stretching from the thicket
Were feeling the latch of the wicket ?

Himself :

You would almost say
These blows were repercussions
Of an avenging Fate !
But how have we earned them ?
The sparks that fell on the barley-shocks and burned them
Still in the ear ;
And all the set backs of the year :
Frost, drought and demurrage :
The tiles blown half off the roof !
What is it ? What is it all for ?
The chastisement of Pride ?
I swear we have no pride.
Or over much love for a year-old bride ?
But it's your duty to love your bride. . . .
And still !
All the sows that died,

All the cows going off milk ;
The churns that came out under proof ;
The hens giving over laying ;
The bullocks straying,
Getting pounded over the hill. . . .

Herself : (in her sleep)

I'll have a kitchen all white tiles ;
And a dairy, all marble the shelves and the floor,
I'll have white-wood kegs for the flour
Black walnut kegs for the rice and barley,
And silvery jugs for the cream and milk. . . .
Oh glorious Me !
And hour by hour by hour by hour
On piles of cushions from hearth to door,
I'll sit sewing my silken seam ;
I'll sit dreaming my milkwhite dream,
With a little, mettlesome, towheaded Charley,
Most stalwart, most truthful of towheaded boys
To leave his ploys and come to my knee
To question how God can be One in Three.
And all the day and all the day
Nothing but smiles
And not a care for my Grown Up one ;
No care at all but kiss and twine ;
Nought to contrive for but plays and ploys
For my son, my son, my son, my son !
Only at nine
While the girls in the parlour play forfeits for toffee,
The dinner finished and men at their wine,
I'll make such after-dinner coffee.
It's more like a dream. . . .

Himself :

If Dixon could pay . . . But he never will. . . .
He promised the money for yesterday. . . .

But poor old Dicky's been through the mill. . . .
And it's late. . . . It's too late to sit here railing at Fate !
He'd pay if he could, but he's got his fix on
Too, poor Dodderly Dixon.
Yet, if he could pay . . .
God, it would carry us over the day
Of herself !

First Clock :

I am the clock on the shelf !
Is . . . Was . . . Is . . . Was . . .
He's late because . . . Too late . . . Because . . .
One . . . Two . . . Three . . . Four !

Himself :

Just over the Day, and a week or two more.
Enough to turn round in. We'd maybe get through.
Not with a hell of a lot
Of margin to spare. . . . But just through !

The Second Clock :

One . . . Two . . . One . . . Two . . .
As—your—hours—pass
I—re—cord—them
Though—you—waste—them
Or—have—stored—them.

All !

One !
Two !
Three !
Four !
Begun,
Half through,
Let be,
All's o'er.

No more at all. At—All !
I'm the Great Clock in the Hall !

Himself :

It is four by the clock ; a creak on the stair
Might waken Herself. It might give her a shock.
I shall doze in the chair.

The House :

Sad ! Sad !

Poor Lad !

I am getting to talk like the clock !

Year after year ; shock after shock !

Sunlight and starlight ; moonlight and shadows,

I've seen him sit on his three legged stool

And heard him whimper, going to school ;

Till he paid the debt that a proper lad owes

Stoutly enough. . . . You might call me a clock

With a face of old brick work instead of the brass of a dial.

For I mark the generations as they pass,

Generation on generation

Passing like shadows over a dial, to triumph or trial

Over the paths and the grass till they lie, all

Silent under the grass.

Himself :

It isn't as if we went courting the slap-up people !

The House :

On the night when he came from the station, in Flood-Year
December. . . .

Himself :

Or kicked our slippers over the steeple,

Or, leaving the whites, ate only the yolk,

Or crowded to fashion as sheep after sheep will.

We're such simple folk

Like any other folk !

With an old house.

Just any old house :

Only it's clean ; you won't find a flea or a louse.

And a few old cows :
Just any old cows
None of your Champion Shorthorns with fabulous yields ;
We've a few old fields
And the poor old mare that gets blinder and blinder . . .
And a lot of Care, to ride behind her !

The House :

I'd like him to remember . . .
For that was my last night of pride,
With windows blazing over the tide
And guests from far and wide !

Himself :

Just to get through, with my lamb untorn !
It's not
Such a hell of a lot
To ask, till the child is born.
You'd think ;
God, you'd think
They'd let us little people
Creep
Past in the shadows
But the sea's
Too deep !
Not sink . . . Not to sink !
Christ, I can't keep
Afloat. It's too
Deep. . . .

The Cat of the House :

He is falling asleep. Up onto his knee !
I shall sleep in the pink !

House : You see.

His mind turns to me
When he lets it go. For he called me a ship
On my last day of pride.

Then, he was driving guests from the station
And the floods were wide
All over the countryside
And all my windows open wide
Blazing like torches down a tide,
Over the waters.

The Old Mare :

That wouldn't be me !
When I was young I lived in Dover
In Kent by the sea. So he didn't drive me.
When I was young I went much faster
Over the sticks, as clean as a hare ;
With a Gunner Officer for my master
And I took officers out to lunch
With their doxies to Folkestone. It wouldn't be me !

Goat :

Munch . . . Munch . . . Munch . . . Munch. . . .
In the Master's clover ; whilst poor old Me . . .

Son of the House :

Malodorous Image of Sin-with-a-Beard
It's time I was heard.

House :

That Christmas night . . .

Son of the House :

It would have to be Christmas
With floods, so they missed Mass !

House :

Your Dad's never missed Mass at Christmas !
And all my windows, blazing with light,
Shouted welcome across the night
And the Master's voice came over to me
" The poor old shanty looks like a ship
Lit up and sailing across the sea ! "

That was my lad !
And another, just as young and as glad
As they used to be before the war
Said : “ And all of her lamps have all their wicks on ! ”
That would be Dixon.

Son of the House :

My mother when her time has loosed her
And I am grown to man's estate
Shall go in gold and filagree ;
And I'll be a king and have a king's glory !

Rooster : Kickeriko ! Kickerikee !
I am the Rooster.

Son of the House :

The Dad with no hair to his pate]
Shall go about telling my story. . . .

Rooster :

I am the Bird of the dawn. I give the morning
I, even I, am the cock of the House ! [a rouse

Skylark :

Time I was up in the Sky ;
For it's time for the dew to dry
And I am the bird of the dawn !

The Nightingale :

Time I was down on my nest.
The moon has gone down in the West ;
Day-folk, good-bye !

House-Dog :

Here's our Young Maid. What a yawn !

Goat :

The Houseboy is crossing the lawn ;
Will he give me a feed ?
That's what I need.

The House :

What a stir ! What a stir !
Did you ever ?
All of a sudden it's day.
I must have nodded away !

Drake :

I am the Drake ! I'm the Drake !
We too have been all night awake,
But making no fuss ; not one of the seven of us.
For our beaks were under our legs
Searching the dregs
Of the lake.
Therefore my ladies lay eggs.

The Maid :

Where have you hid
The copper lid ?
Where on earth is it hidden ?

Houseboy :

I did'n !

Maid :

You did !

Houseboy :

I did'n. I never !

Maid :

I seen you !

Houseboy :

You *never* !

Maid :

How on earth can I ever
Cook the pigs' food without the old lid
Of the copper ?

Houseboy :

You whopper ! I never !

Maid :

You did !

Houseboy :

I never : I did'n !

Maid :

The lid's lying out in the midden.
Himself must have took it.

Houseboy :

So there then. Give over !

Maid :

As for Herself I do love her
But the Master. He's a disaster,
For losing and leaving about !

Houseboy :

Old Mare's in the clover !

Maid :

Along of your leaving her out !

Houseboy :

I shet 'er in stable !

Maid :

You never !

Houseboy :

I did ! Whosomever
Says that I didn'n, look out !

Postman :

I am His Majesty's Mail !
I deliver
Letters and bills all blue.

Maid :

For a sweetheart that isn't much boast, man !
Being so weak on your legs
You had better keep hens and sell eggs,
If you want to keep me !

Postman :

I agree ! I am just an old postman and gone very
Pretty well on the shelf ! [weak in the legs !
If I could get anything better I'd never deliver a letter !

Maid :

Why on earth can't you speak to the Missis
And get her to speak to Himself.
If you can't keep a stiff upper lip. . . .

Postman :

Well, then ! You take command and run the ship !

Maid :

Tidd'n' no ship !

Postman :

All houses be like ships
Having ship's companies and Masters and all aboard.
And up they go and down and up and down !

Maid :

Good Lord
I do like men that keep stiff upper lips !

Postman :

Hark to her. Hearken ! Now this is . . .
This blue-becrossed envelope whose letters slope
Up and down like a ship on the sea. . . .
It's all one, a ship or a house,
And some get into port with every hand
And some never make the land.

Maid :

If you had the spunk of a mouse
You'd come up and speak to the Missis !

Postman :

This long one for him of the house,
Written as plain as text. . . .

Maid :

Did you Ever ! What Next !
Our Master's asleep in his chair !
I'll wager that never a leg he's stirred
Since four of the clock with the cat on his knee.
That's the manner of man our Master be !
Enough to worry us all into drink for. . . .

Postman :

This letter's registered
And sealed at all the edges.

Maid : (to Himself)

The Postman wants a receipt in ink.

Himself :

To sink . . . To sink. . . .

Maid :

Here's a registered letter
The Postman wants a receipt in ink for !

Herself : (from upper window)

Charley !
The mare's in the barley ;
She's gone through the clover
And knocked down the sticks

Himself : (to Houseboy)

Go : take her a halter !
So then, that's over.

We are over the fix
For a quarter or so
And then, if things alter
A bit for the better. . . .

Herself :

And were we in such a terrible fix
And you never let me know ? . . .

Himself :

You see, I'd lent money to Dixon
To get him out of *his* fix. . . .
It was like being master of a ship
And watching Enemy torpedoes slip
Through waves of green, and all my folk aboard !

Herself :

Himself ! Himself ! You'll surely now afford
Yourself a new coat
And a proper chain and collar for the goat !

Himself :

Good Lord !
Herself ! Herself ! You may go to town
And see a Show. There are five or six on !
And you can put the money down,
And you can have the little old gown
You said you'd fix on.

Herself :

But, oh my dear, we can't afford it !

Himself :

You've not had a jaunt since the honeymoon ;
And you've moidered and slaved . . . And very soon . . .

The Son of the House :

Kings shall come praying to me for a boon ;
I shall so prink it and king it and lord it
Over the sunshine, under the moon. . . .
I'll smite all mean men thigh and hip !

Himself :

This poor old, patched up thing of a ship
May take us yet over fields all green
And you be a little, jessamy queen . . .
In the fields all green !

Son of the House :

As years go on and days go by
I shall grow and grow in majesty !

Herself : (to Himself)

You've always said I'd no majesty !
Not even enough for a cobbler's queen !

The House :

By and by
They'll be talking of copper roofs for the styel

The Pigs :

We were wondering when they would come to the
Yet they say that it's we that pay the rent ! [pigs !

Himself :

Great ancient ships in foreign rigs
Went sailing under the firmament
And still sail under the sky and away ;
And great ships sink without soul to tell.
But if we've luck, in the last resort
We shall bring our schooner into port
In a land-locked bay. . . .

Herself :

And he is so careful, my lord and my master,
And skilled to keep us all from disaster ;
Such a clever, kindly, working One !
That I'll yet have my dairy with slabs of marble ;
My sweetbriar thicket where sweet birds warble ;
An ordered life and a household whereof he

Most shall praise the nine o'clock coffee.
And my little, mettlesome, brown-kneed One
To lie on my heart when the day is done.

Rooster :

Pullets, go in, go out of the sun ;
For he's climbing high and the hayseed's dun ;
I am the Rooster with marvellous legs :
Pullets go in and lay your eggs !

Herself :

For my son, my son, my son, my son !



EPILOGUE

The House Itself :

I am their House !

I resemble

The drawing of a child.

Drawing " Just a House " a child draws me

With a cowstall beside it, maybe, or a willow tree,

Or aspens that tremble.

That's as may be.

But all the other houses, of all nations,

The simple houses of the country ; the grand houses of the
[Town

All, all the houses beneath the farstretching sky

Shall have much the same fates as I

And they that dwell in me.

All, all shall mark the pressing of generations

On the heels of preceding generations ;

Shall bear with folly ;

Shall house joy and melancholy ;

At seasons shall be hung with holly ;

On given days they shall have the blinds drawn down.

They pass into the hands of generations

New. . . . These shall remain

For a short space or a long,

Masterful, cautious, strong ;

Hardy, confident or overbold.

But strong hands falter ;

Frosts come ; great winds ; drought ;

The tiles blow loose ; rooftrees wear out ;

Rain

Percolates down by some rafter.
So their youths wear out ;
Until they may become very gentle and mild ;
For certain they shall become rat-ridden and very old,
Having stood too long ;
So they go down to the ground.
The circle comes round
All over again.
Over and over again !
And if You rise on this earth a thousand years after
I have fallen to the ground
Your fate shall be the same
It is only the name
That shall alter.



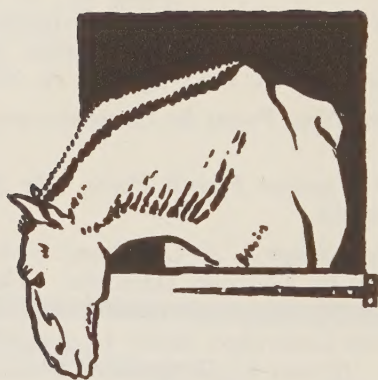
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